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ABSTRACT

A comparative, interpretive analysis of the social organization of contrasting groups of rural youth from New Mexico ad Ohio was approached from an ethnomethodological perspective, relying on direct observation, intensive personal interviews, and key informants to produce a broader understanding of particular youth coping with their social contexts. Subjects were six Spanish American youth of Northern Taos County, New Mexico, and five youth from predominantly Mennonite and Amish Eastern Holmes County, Ohio. Informally organized same-sex peer groups formed the most valued social structure for both youth. Except for the academic aspects of school programs, all youth had little or no involvement in formal extracurricular or sport activities. Parents were a major problem to both groups, perceived as being both too strict and not caring. More intense parental-child conflict occurred in Holmes County, where parents were extreme in attempting to enforce rigid moral and social norms. While Holmes youth were more mobile, all had work roles permitting less leisure time than Taos youth. Alcohol and pot were easily attainable in Taos County and used from a relatively early age. Dramatic differences existed in religious orientations: Taos youth did not view themselves as religious and did not attend church regularly, while the opposite was true for Holmes youth. (NEC)

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LIFE SITUATIONS OF RURAL YOUTH FROM TWO DIFFERENT CULTURAL SETTINGS: NORTHERN TAOS COUNTY, NEW MEXICO, AND EASTERN HOLMES COUNTY, OHIO*

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THE OBSERVER

This is an account of a personal research journey of a sociologist struggling to get a firmer grip on social reality. More precisely it is a brief overview of a research effort I carried out during a sabbatical leave this past summer. I decided to use this leave to develop a broader perspective toward ethnic and minority group studies and, at the same time, to test my capabilities in utilizing research techniques in reference to field observation different from the standard survey techniques. To carry out these objectives I elected to study the social organization of the life situations of two sets of rural youth representing two distinctly different cultural traditions and located in two very different regions of the U.S.: Spanish American youth of Northern Taos County, New Mexico and youth from the predominantly Mennonite and Amish sectors of Eastern Holmes County, Ohio.

My general objective was to provide observations to serve as a basis for comparative analysis of the social organization of the life situations of two broadly contrasting groupings of rural youth. In a sense this represents an extension of my prior multiethnic, comparative youth studies carried out mainly within Texas over the last decade, utilizing the "normal" sociology of survey analysis.[1] My intention was to approach these investigations from a ethnomethodological perspective, relying on direct observation, selected intensive personal interviews, and key informants. I would attempt to follow Max Weber's "verstehen" principle, probing into motives for social actions as well as noting the probability of their patterned occurrences. My analysis of the observations to be gathered during these short periods of time would be of the "interpretive" style rather than the more normal, at least for me, quantitative style predominant in the social sciences today. Also, this

research differs from my past efforts in that it attempts to produce a broader understanding of particular youth coping with their social contexts rather than a narrower but more generalized understanding of attributes of categories (ethnic, racial, or SES) of youth.

SPECIFIC RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

My original goals in structuring this research were to develop an understanding of variability existing between two distinctly different rural populations in reference to two aspects of social organization: (1) the life situations of youth, and (2) the nature of intergroup relations and orientations existing among distinct ethnic groups. However, in this paper I will focus on an analysis of the life situations of the youth I observed and interviewed. In this regard, I had established as a high priority goal, before arriving in the field, to attempt to achieve an understanding of how rural youth were tied into or organizationally linked with the structures of the community and the larger society. Also, I was particularly interested in exploring whether or not so-called formal "youth organizations" were of significance in this respect.

LIMITATIONS

While I am inclined to think that it would be good from a scientific perspective to provide each type of observation in separate sets, I think it makes more sense to integrate these observations around substantive foci (i.e., "youth organizations" or the "significance of the church") making explicit to the extent possible the sources of my observations. This integrative approach to the analysis of the observations will provide a more coherent understanding of the rural youth and their communities; although

it might not provide as good an explicit assurance of the validity of the generalizations developed. Another advantage to this "integrative" approach is that it helps provide "cover" for my informants.

Anticipating the critical reaction of my "normal," sociologist friends, I realize the severe limitations faced by a lone observer working for a short period in strange settings. On the other hand, I do believe it is possible for a disciplined observer, with good conceptual tools, to develop significant insights and understandings of social situations, given the commitment to do so. My greatest reservations about this interpretive analysis involve the breadth of observations I made and not the validity of the inferences I have drawn from those I have.

THE STUDY AREAS

Taos County[2]

The total population of Taos County is about 17.5 thousand people of which over 85% have Spanish surnames and speak Spanish. The town of Taos, located in the southern end of the county, is the largest place - it is just about 2,500 people, the only urban place. Less than 10% of the population is involved in farming. Most of the area of the county is sparsely populated - large hunks of it are in the National Forest and privately owned large ranches. Most of the population is clustered in about two dozen towns and villages, usually located in the small valleys bordering the permanent streams - availabiiity of water is a critical concern here. Outside of the tourist industry (fishing lodges, ski resorts, and etc.) the only major industry appears to be the molybedenum mine outside of Questa.

Lying north of the town of Taos, between the deep gorge of the Rio Grande River on the west and the highest range of mountains in New Mexico on the east,

is Northern Taos County, New Mexico. It is a land of contrasts in topography, weather and human communities. It holds Taos Pueblo, one of the oldest known (to those of European extraction) communities of Native Americans, where some 1400 "Indians" still live and endure the continuing intrusions of the paleface into their daily lives.

In the summer the National Forest is crowded with campers and trout-fishers - cars with Texas license plates seem to predominate even over those from New Mexico on the state highways and park roads. In the winter people come from the northeast, the west coast, as well as Texas to use some of the finest ski slopes to be found. New, modern vacation homes and lodges are springing up continuously.

After several days of driving around and eye-balling the targeted area for study, I selected three particular towns to concentrate my attention on: Arroyo Hondo, San Cristobal and Valdez. The three communities were similar in a number of respects (see Table 1). All were old residence areas, predominantly Spanish American, none had a complete school system, none had a resident priest (although each had a church that the villagers maintained), and there was a lack of community-wide organizations.

Table 1. Relevant Communities in the Northern Taos County Study Area

A. Study Communities	Households	Spanish Americans	Schools
Arroyo Hondo	200	85%	Grade School
San Cristobal	35	85%	None
Valdez	40	95%	None

All figures given above are rough estimates and do not refer to actual, precise counts. The villagers could not give consistent estimates. Additional information on the population of Taos County and its subdivisions obtained from the 1970 U.S. Census is provided in APPENDIX-A.

Holmes County, Ohio

Located some sixty miles southwest of Akron, and just outside of the highly industrialized zone of northeast Ohio, are the rolling hills of Holmes County. The county is essentially split in half ethnically, and in topography and land use. The eastern half is populated predominantly by Mennonite, Old Order Amish, and other conservatively oriented religious groups. The western part holds a more ~~homogeneous~~ heterogeneous ethnic mix of less religiously conservative peoples. Millersburg, the largest town in the county (less than 2,500) and the county seat, straddles these two halves. The county is rural, predominantly agricultural, and has little in the way of industry besides a thriving summer tourist industry and a few agriculturally related small industries (i.e. cheese factories, etc.). According to the County Agent, Richard McNutt, Holmes County produces 38 million dollars worth of agricultural goods a year, mostly from the well cared farms of the "Plain" and "Near-Plain" people from the eastern half.

Like Taos County, Holmes County is small (22,000), rural, and has a large tourist clientele. Unlike Taos County, it is not as dominated by a single ethnic population, it is heavily agricultural, and has fewer but larger distinct population centers. Also, it lies within easy traveling time of a number of large, heavily industrialized metropolitan centers - Akron, Youngstown, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Columbus; whereas Taos County does not.

Eastern Holmes County is a treat to the eye in the summer months. Neat, well kept farms are spread on slopes of hills and through the valleys. Lush corn, beautiful horses and cattle, and flower gardens exhibiting dazzling colors fill the eye as one wanders across the countryside. Small villages, such as Charm, break the monotony of the farm land periodically. And, occasionally a larger center - Walnut Creek and Berlin - present an opportunity

to "serve" hungry tourists "Amish" artifacts and food. It is beyond question a beautiful place.

I selected several locations for concentrated attention within the study area. One was a place appropriately named Charm, and its surrounding hinterland - a village of about 40 homes (some of them farms), a general store, a restaurant, a cheese factory, a blacksmith, a feed store, an elementary school, and a post-office (in a small trailer). This community is predominantly Old Order Amish and Conservative Mennonite in population. Berlin, a market center for the farm people in the area and a tourist trap for outsiders, was also selected. It is a town of about 800 people, the majority of whom I am sure could trace their heritage back to the "Plain Folk." This town has a number of stores and several restaurants. It is larger than any of the three towns included in the Taos County investigation, and does have a complete school system (through high school).

One way both of these communities differed from those studied in Taos County was that neither had a bar: a significant difference from the perspectives of most of the youth I talked with.

MODES OF OBSERVATION

I approached both study areas with no explicit preparation for entry; in fact, I had not even selected targeted communities within which to concentrate my attention for observations. Consequently, I entered each area as a complete stranger. Obviously, I don't recommend this as a general practice. But it fit my desire at the time for an open, personal research adventure - one that would test fully my capabilities to escape the survey syndrome.

In each case I spent a total of about 2 weeks actually living in each study area with one of my sons (i.e., Andy in Taos County and Mike in Holmes County). The first few days were spent eye-balling the targeted study area, selecting particular communities for concentrated observation, and making initial contacts. The presence of my son in each case appeared to greatly facilitate initial contacts and establishment of trust.

The remainder of the time was spent in general, open observation of social activity and in carrying out in-depth personal interviews. In Taos County I intensively interviewed a total of ten Spanish Americans ("Taosenos") and utilized a number of key informants (Spanish American and Anglo). The age of those interviewed was from about 50 to 15; six of these were young people of whom 3 were girls. In Holmes County the number of interviews and the attributes of the interviewees were similar.

I carried out the personal interviews in a conversational manner, utilizing no observable guides and taking no notes during the contact period. Obviously, the interviews were structured in some respect - in terms of topics to be covered - but, they were also very loose and open, allowing for free movements of topics discussed. Each day I recorded the conversations from recall as exactly as I could. Truthfully, I was amazed at how clear my recall appeared to be; however, I did note that on some occasions I did

forget segments of the conversation when initially recording, and recalled and added them later. At all times I tried to record in great detail all social activity I observed during the entire stay in the study area. I found myself spending as much time recording as observing on some days. Certainly, a "working" tape recorder would facilitate this operation.

I think these operations worked well for me and were productive among the Spanish Americans of Taos County - the people, particularly the young ones, tend to be extremely open and friendly. On the other hand, they didn't work as well within the limited time I allowed myself among the Old Order Amish of Holmes County - their sense of boundary maintenance makes them reluctant to give information about their communities. Consequently, I had to deflect my attention away from a concentration on this ethnic group to capture a more diverse and broader focus (to include "High People" or Non-Amish). This is the primary reason I selected Berlin as an area of concentration. One should not misunderstand; I was treated warmly by most of the Amish I met and developed friendships of significance with several; however, it was difficult to get information from them about themselves. In particular, we were not permitted to interact <u>at all</u> with Amish females beyond puberty age.

Even though the Eastern Holmes County population I ended up focusing on could not be said to be ethnically homogeneous in a strict sense, the youth studied do share a common ethnic heritage - all come from family backgrounds that <u>were</u> at one time Mennonite or Amish.

THE LIFE SITUATIONS OF RURAL YOUNG PEOPLE

In this section of the paper I will "cover" my subjects and attempt not to pin-point their identity by providing too thorough and precise descriptions of them. To the best of my ability I will protect their identities and assure them the confidentiality I promised them.

Ordering, structuring and analyzing the observations from these types of observations is much more difficult than making the observations themselves. There are no numbers to offer pretense of objectivity and to easily manipulate with a computer program. A great deal greater burden is explicitly placed on the researcher's own shoulders relative to evaluations of reliability of information and validity of inferences. You must be willing to bear this burden to move your raw observations into meaningful sociological inferences. I do not intend this report to be an exercise in formal sociological research in the current understanding of "normal" praxis; but, rather my intention is to share a personal research experience and what it produced in understandings about selected segments and aspects of social reality.

Youth of Northern Taos County[3]

Intensive, informal interviews were made with six adolescent youth, male and female, covering all three villages. It is the privacy and identity of these respondents I desire to protect most of all. Consequently, I will not even use fictitious names or misleading descriptions. Instead, I will try to present a general picture of their life situations, pointing out exceptions and illustrating when possible with selected direct quotes that I had recorded.

Youth Groups and School

You will recall that one of my specific objectives in the study was to

explore to what extent these rural young people were involved in formal youth organizations. Generally, they were not involved in any formal youth groups located in the villages - there were none. Even in the context of the school, participation in clubs was limited and superficial when it existed (usually subject matter oriented clubs). For instance, one boy belonged to only one formal group - the vocational agriculture club in school; however, he could not even recall its name ("FFA"). This was characteristic of all respondents but one, a senior girl: she belonged to the choir and had served as a member of student government. They were unaware of any 4-H Club; although, several thought one might exist in Arroyo Hondo. None of these people participated in organized school athletics. "It would be too inconvenient. It gets dark early in the winter and the roads can be difficult to travel." In Arroyo Hondo there is a community basketball team run by the brothers who operate the bar; however, this involves mostly post-high school age young people.

It was hard for me to accept the fact that not even the high school seemed to provide an organizational base (outside of academics) for these young people. I pressed them to find out whether or not they used it for leisure - attending dances, football and basketball games, and etc. Without exception their responses were negative, for the same reasons they didn't participate in sports.

The general orientation toward school was that "it was alright." One of the girls had dropped out this past year, but was hoping to start again this year. Another girl found school enjoyable but tough. All seemed to think the school was providing them with the opportunity for an education; however, only one seemed to take this seriously. Another girl had left school when she became pregnant and had no intentions of returning.

Except for the academic aspects of the school programs, generally the youth had little or no involvement in formal youth organizations of any kind.

Church and Religion

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of my observations was the lack of the young peoples involvement in the "Church." Prior to my visit I had assumed that traditionally the Spanish Americans of northern New Mexico were very religious and active participants in the Roman Catholic Church. With one exception (the same one as noted above), the young people neither attended church regularly nor considered themselves particularly religious. By the way, Tom S. and Robert had indicated similar information to me about themselves earlier. It was generally understood that, "Only the older people go to Mass."

Family and Parents

Parents never were mentioned as a major problem by the youth I talked to. A few of the girls thought their parents were too strict - "we can't smoke in front of them," and "I have to be in at 11 p.m." My general impression was that these stress situations in the parent-child relationship were viewed more as minor irritations than as major, lasting problems.

While, as was noted earlier, there is a striking difference in patterns of church participation between the generational groupings in this village, most families seem to share common values and aspirations. While stress situations do develop, this appears to be generally of minor significance as compared with the obvious mutual concern and open affection displayed among family members, even among sibs. There perhaps is a tendency for some of the young people to feel that their parents don't care enough about their problems to do anything about resolving them; however, it is obvious they do care. When I asked one father why he didn't take some action to try and get the community to put in a recreational area for the teen-agers near the old school he responded with mild anger (which I interpreted as evidence of felt guilt),

asking, "Where will the money come from?" Then excusing himself he called attention to his own problems in attempting to provide an adequate home for his family.

Friends and Leisure Activity

The primary context of interaction for these youth, outside of the family, was small peer cliques, usually made up of same sex peers from the local village. These informally organized groups probably were valued above all other associations by most of the youth. Dating, particularly steady dating, did not appear to enter in as an important social element until the age of 16 or 17 for these youth. Of those I interviewed intensively, ranging in age from 15 to 18, only one - the oldest girl - was dating steady. Even in this case, she was hesitant to label it "steady" dating. It surprised me that these youth indicated they did not date much, except for the two girls who had dropped out of school. Close, continuing personal associations tended to be restricted to these small, homogenous, locally derived, peer cliques for the most part.

Relationships with young people from outside their own village tended to be periodic and superficial - this included school associations. There was some tendency toward dissociative interaction to occur between boys from different towns, but not within the same town. For instance, boys from Arroyo Hondo and Questa tangle on occasion: these two towns have a structured, continuing animosity toward each other that goes back many years. Fighting among boys from different towns appears expected, and is not viewed with a great deal of concern. If the adults don't encourage fighting, they apparently don't work hard at discouraging it. I had read that this "fighting" pattern was related to competition for girls (Gonzalez, 1967). However, my

subjects didn't think this was so - they just enjoyed it on occasion. Perhaps, this was their self-selected structural alternative for school sports.

I repeatedly received information from the respondents indicating that most of their friendship relationships were within the ethnic group itself. Few knew any Indian youth very well and most seemed not to care for interaction with Anglo youth they met in school. Here are some of their comments on this subject:

(1) "Most (Anglos) seem to act uppity - sometimes we fight in school."
(2) "I know one (Anglo) at school who is cool - he's different."
(3) "I don't know any Indians well - none of my friends do either - they keep to themselves."
(4) "All my friends are from here in town."
(5) "My regular dudes keep others away."

Daily Patterns

Clearly, one has to view the daily life of these youth in a seasonal context - summer and winter are two different worlds for them. Also, it appears that sex differentiation is somewhat significant in this respect.

Let's consider the summer time first. Perhaps the most prominent and important activity, from the perspective of these youth, that took place during the summer was the periodic, village based, "field party." I got the definite impression that these occurred regularly (on week-ends) in all three villages. These would normally take place in a relatively secluded area, screened from view of the adults in the village by distance, topography, and vegetation. I was shown the place in each town where these were held. What did the youth do at these parties? They enjoyed each other - singing, telling stories. Almost everyone would drink beer and some, perhaps most, would use "pot." Both girls and boys would be present at these parties; however, generally no heavy sexual interaction would take place. I observed one such "field party" in progress - it took place beside a beautiful, meandering mountain

stream on the edge of the village, screened from the nearest road by a high bank. Maybe 15 teen-agers were standing around drinking beer, "smoking," talking and laughing, and generally having a good time.

The summer presented no great problem for the young people. They worked if they could get a job, and transportation to it. If not, they loafed or hung around talking, playing ball or watching T.V. This is what they said. However, I got the very definite feeling they felt penned in or restrained and maybe bored. There was too much time and too little alternatives for activity - unless you had a car. And, you need a job to get a car, but you couldn't find a job without having a car! The boys would fish sometimes and on occasion youth of both genders would "go down to the river" to swim.

In the winter it gets very cold at these high elevations, the roads are often dangerous to travel, night falls early, and besides most of these youth don't have access to cars. There is not much work to do at home and very few have jobs. They don't participate in school activities. But then school consumes much of the day - and they see their friends there. What else do they do? In their own words, "Not much." "Hang around, watch T.V., have snow fights, and sometimes a friend with a car will drive by and holler." They don't get into Taos much outside of school time - they would like to though. My impression is that the winter doesn't drag on them as much as one might expect. Yet, it would be better if they had a place to gather and do things - maybe just a small building (the old school, for instance). Why don't they? "Nobody cares," they seem to think.

Moral Behavior

Both alcohol and "pot" were easily attainable and most youth used both from a relatively early age. One of my friends, a bartender, estimated that 85% of all youth (teen-agers) used pot. I challenged this, knowing it was

an extremely high rate of use. He insisted that if anything it was conservative. My interviews with the youth themselves strongly supported his assertion. At the same time, one of my respondents had never used "pot" and another only tried it - both were girls. Hard drugs were used only by a few and the young people showed strong disapproval of them. The information I obtained from the youths indicated there was a normative distinction by sex held by parents in the use of "drugs" - girls were not to use these, not even cigarettes - but nobody seemed to care much if the boys smoked or drank.

I probed into sex activities and found the youth rather liberally oriented in this regard. Most indicated that there wasn't any heavy sex coming down at the field parties, only on a one-to-one basis. Several adults had indicated to me that there was a serious problem with young, teen-age pregnancies in one village. Without exception the young people challenged this assertion - "Maybe in Taos but not here." One of the subjects had experienced this, but this was an exception. In carrying back the youths' perceptions to one of my adult informants I received this response, "I don't mean one or two girls, I mean many! This is a serious problem. They watch T.V. and think they can do anything they want. The parents can't control them or don't care." Going back to one of the girls in this village I asked again if this was a serious problem. She agreed it might be - "Some of the parents don't seem to care." She indicated to me that few girls were told about contraceptives - "usually they don't talk about such things." She told me that once a man had come to the high school to discuss such things with the girls. While she thought that was good and enjoyed it, many girls disliked it and many parents protested. So, it's not done any more.

One very beautiful girl of about 16 (she looked older) who I first met in a bar while she was buying a six-pack, had gotten pregnant and dropped out

of school. She had given her baby to her sister. She was living with her mother and just "running around." I talked with one of my informants, an adult male, who knew this girl well. "Couldn't anybody help her?" I asked. "Doesn't anybody care?" I continued. He said, "I care - but what can you do?" What will happen to this girl? He speculated that she might end up in Denver as a prostitute.

Life Orientations and Perceived Needs

Most of the young people say they like their communities. Still all want to eventually move out when they finish school - at least for a while. They seem rather fuzzy about the future, unsure of what they can or will become. Some can tell you what jobs they would like to have - a mechanic, a teacher, a technician, a hunter/mountain man - but few feel certain of having them. It obviously troubles them to think about it. They respect and love their families - deep affection, freely expressed, was commonly observed even among similarly aged sibs. But most want to marry later than their parents and have fewer children. Several of the girls indicated that they "didn't want to get tied down" till their mid-twenties. Only one of the six I talked with at length was seriously considering college.

What about the self-determined, priority needs of these youth? In each case I asked them what their biggest problems were. Without exception two things surfaced as prime problems. First, all indicated a need for more freedom of movement - transportation to Taos, a car, a way to get out and do things. This was of strongest concern for the boys. Second, was a need to have more available cash - they were willing to work for it. Of course this problem is not unrelated to the first one. Also, although this was not as close to the conscious surface as the two already mentioned, there was the felt need to have a place to go and do things with peers. Obviously, the lack

of direct access to a means of filling this need in the village contributed to the trapped feeling that pushed the felt need for geographical mobility (having a car) so high.

Of course there were more personal concerns as well. While having wheels was the only major, dominant concern of several of the boys, other youth gave primacy to somewhat unique problems:

(1) "My greatest problem is trying to decide what I want to do - be a secretary or a teacher."
(2) "My biggest problem is getting back into school."
(3) "I need a job, some way to help my family - my mother can't work."

Several times, in discussion of school or parents, young people mentioned that they didn't feel they got good advice when they wanted it or needed it: "I can't go to anyone - nobody cares." Perhaps, this explains one reason for their willingness to talk openly to me.

Holmes County Youth Compared

Only one Old Order Amish youth was interviewed directly - a 17 year old male. However, I did interview three older Amish men intensively, including "The Bishop"* and also I have a host of recorded observations from a variety of key informants and many hours of direct observation. Still, most of the information I gathered pertains to the "High People"** segment of the population. Among this grouping I have five intensive youth interviews - 2 males and 3 females, ranging in age from 15 to 22. One of these respondents was a Mennonite, one an ex-Mennonite, two had parents who were at one time Amish, and the other indicated his parents were "kicked out" of a religious sect ("a Conservative Fellowship"). Three lived in Berlin and two lived on the

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* The religious leader of the Amish community.
** The term Amish used for outsiders.

fringes of the Charm community in the open-country. Because of the lack of direct interview information on Amish youth, I will concentrate my discussion here on the non-Amish segment of Eastern Holmes County's youth; hereafter this grouping will be referred to as the "High People."

Youth Groups and School

Perhaps the Amish feelings about formal education (limited to 8 years and concentrated on basic skills) is not as unique as many people think - certainly this is true as far as Eastern Holmes County is concerned. All but two of the youth I talked to had strong, negative feelings about school and three had dropped out of high school (including the Amish boy). Permit me to let them speak for themselves:

> Female-17: She says she definitely does not like school. "Well," she says, "I hated the principal. I would skip out quite often and he would call my parents. The only subject I liked was science -- the teacher made it fun -- he was really cool." I asked her about other subjects she liked -- she offers art. She has had two years of typing -- but says she is only fair.
>
> Male-20: He quit school when he was a sophomore. Not because he didn't like school -- "In our family it was expected you would go to work when you could get a good job." His parents apparently encouraged him to quit. He's not sorry about this -- "Education wouldn't help me with a job -- it doesn't matter. Well, maybe for a real good job. But not what I want to do. What I really want to do is drive a truck (a semi)."

The one boy who liked school was a star basketball player and was thinking about playing ball in college and getting into pro ball.

The feeling I got was that a number of the young people felt estranged from their school - it was there for the adults, not for them. Here are some of their comments on this: "We aren't allowed to have dances - not even a Prom!" "We don't even have a football team!"

Old Order Amish youth are expected to leave after eight years of school. Even here the feelings toward schooling may be negative as indicated by this

comment from an Amish youth who went to a public (Amish) school: "They didn't teach German and the teacher wasn't Amish -- it was a two-room school!" "We speak Pennsylvania Dutch till school," he says. The drastic introduction to a new language must have left an impact.

Clearly, the Holmes County youth differed in general from the Taos County young people in their orientations toward school: the former were more likely to be negatively oriented toward it and to value completion of high school less. This seems to logically fly in the face of another difference observed relative to school experiences of the two sets of youth. The Holmes County youth were more likely to see the school as a source of social participation - particularly participation in and attendance at sports events. A similarity, however, exists in the fact that only one of the Holmes youth indicated involvement in formally structured youth organizations either within or outside of school. For instance, they were vaguely aware of the existence of 4-H groups; however, they indicated disinterest in these. This represents a striking parallel to what was observed in Taos County. The Old Order Amish, maintaining consistent strict boundary maintenance, certainly discouraged youth participation in such groups and probably prohibited it.

Church Participation

Perhaps the most dramatic difference between the organization of the life situation of the two sets of youth studied existed in reference to religious orientations and church participation. Whereas most of the Taos County youth did not view themselves as particularly religious and did not attend church regularly, the opposite was true of the youth observed in Holmes County. Only one youth interviewed in the Holmes County area indicated a lack of religious valuation; and this was coupled with strong negative

feelings about organized religion and church-goers. All the rest indicated frequent (usually weekly) attendance at church and a tendency to view themselves as sincerely religious. This general pattern, considered together with the one extreme exception, clearly indicates the pervasive importance of religion and church in Holmes County. In Taos County the general orientation was to take a more neutral position in this regard - one associated with neither strong positive or negative affect.

Churches were obviously focal points of community activity even in the smaller towns of Eastern Holmes County. They were numerous, well kept, and filled with social activity several times a week. This is quite a contrast to what was observed in Taos County. The generational split on church participation observed in the Taos County villages apparently does not exist here.

I would be presenting less than an honest and total picture of the Holmes County situation if I did not call attention to my perception that youth viewed the importance of religion in their life circumstances dualistically - as having good and bad consequences for them. There was no question they resented the restrictions in school activities (dances) and community organizations (access to beer and dancing) that severely limited their opportunities for leisure and which they attributed to the influence of churches and religious leaders. I sensed a general concern with a heavy, restrictive moralistic climate that they perceived to prevail around them. Over and over again they indicated patterned attempts to escape this smothering element by riding down to Sugar Creek or Baltic to drink, dance, see a movie, or just ride around "raising hell."

Obviously I have intentionally excluded the Amish youth from the general picture drawn above. And, for good reason - I don't think I have any reliable

information about Amish youth in this regard. Obviously, religious orientations among Amish youth would be strong and the nature of the orientation (+ or -) would essentially determine whether or not these youth would remain Amish. I picked up a lot of pieces of information that would lead me to believe that the Amish community had a relatively high attrition rate among its older youth; however, exactly how high I am not able to say. Still, even the ex-Amish I met and interviewed had strong feelings of religiosity and were active church participants.

I think the heavy atmosphere of religiosity fostered a narrow, conservative set of moral norms and extreme sanctioning that frustrated many of the interests of the local young people in Holmes County and contributed to their desire to get out of their local communities. At the same time, it did provide them with a definite organizational nexus for structured peer associations and adult-youth relationships on a community-wide basis that apparently did not exist in Taos County.

Friends and Leisure

Like the Taos County youth, Holmes County youth's significant peer associations evolved almost entirely within differentiated ethnic units and among the "High People" within religious denominations. Strong anti-Amish sentiments and negative stereotypes were readily apparent among most non-Amish youth - even those whose parents were once Amish. At the same time, unlike Taos County the immediate local community (physical proximity) did not appear to be as significant in restricting peer associations among Holmes County youth. This is probably related to the fact that place locations (villages, towns) did not seem to engender strong identifications on the part of the young people - there were no strong, patterned rivalries apparent among the different places. It appeared that in Holmes County ethnicity and

religion were the real boundary establishing criteria among communities. Here are some remarks from the lips of my subjects that illustrate these general inferences:

(1) "I want to get away from here - to leave this place. There's nothing to do."
(2) "A lot of people here are snobs. They are always minding your business, but sometimes you see them and they don't even talk to you."
(3) "People around here are too snobbish - they will ignore you if you drink or do something you shouldn't." He wants to live in a big city - maybe California.
(4) "I like this country; it's beautiful - but not the people. They go to church on Sunday and they screw you over the rest of the week. They won't do nothing for you - they wouldn't give you half a sandwich if you were starving."

Surprisingly, even the Amish youth I interviewed wants to leave this area and move to "Texas or Montana."

Leisure activity among the Holmes County youth was structured somewhat differently from that observed for Taos County youth. For one thing there is less time for it - all of the Holmes County youth have work roles that take up a lot of time. Related to this is the fact that the older youth (above 16) almost always have their own wheels (a cycle or a car). The younger ones tend to hang-out around a local eating place - in Berlin this is a fast-food place on the edge of town. During school they do attend school sponsored athletic contests. The older ones tend to spend their time with a small clique of same-sex peers or dates, either parking, riding around town and countryside, or traveling to Sugar Creek and other places to gain access to bars, dancing, and movies. This provides a continuing basis for friction between the youth and their parents.

The Holmes County youth are much more mobile than those of Taos County, and consequently their leisure activities are not as concentrated in their local residence areas.

In all honesty, I can't say much about Amish youth in this regard.

Except for those males between the ages when they have left school (about 14) and when they get married (19-24), leisure appears to be structured in terms of family activity and, especially for boys, outdoor activity such as hunting. During my visit I saw a number of Amish boys and girls riding as couples in "courting buggies" in the evenings, and observed the boys playing softball several times late in the evening (they have organized community teams).

Family

The significance of family as a focal point for organizing life situations of Amish youth is predominant. Except for young men who have left school but who have not yet joined the church, almost all activity of a social nature is family structured.

The "High People" young people of Holmes County appear to experience more frequent and intense parental-child and even intersib stress and conflict than was observed to be the case in Taos County. It was my judgment that one of the strong motives generally underlying the almost universal desire of Holmes County youth to "get out" of the local community eventually was to escape negative family experiences. From what the youth told me and from what I observed directly, I got the definite impression that parents were extreme in attempting to enforce rigid moral and social norms and that they were not beyond using younger sibs systematically as "watch dogs" for older ones. This situation seemed to be particularly oppressive for females - at least, they perceived this to be the case.

Daily Patterns

From what has been described so far it is relatively easy to see that the daily patterns of Holmes County youth differ in patterned ways from that of the Spanish American youth of Taos County. Regular or periodic work,

participation in church related activities, more involvement in school as a context for leisure time, frequent excursions out of town, and more or less continuous hassles with family members represent structured aspects of daily life for non-Amish youth of Holmes County not evident in the situations of Taos County youth. In addition, seasonal variation probably does not constitute as dramatic a shift in daily patterns within Holmes County as is the case for Taos County, due at least in part to the higher level of autonomous mobility ("wheels") the Holmes County youth have.

Amish youth, boys in particular, have a very rigidly structured daily routine, structured in terms of family work and other activities. The only exception I could observe to this general pattern was the more or less deliberate freedom from the family given young men who are out of school but not yet married - "time for sowing wild oats." Still, this freedom is largely restricted to late evenings and, from what I heard from a number of sources, was used in one of two ways - courting or partying with same-sex peers (i.e., drinking). I never could find out much about the girls.

Moral Behavior

My general impression of Eastern Holmes County, as I said before, is that it has a heavy, oppressive, narrow, and rigid moralistic atmosphere that permeates all aspects of community life, certainly all that youth are most interested in. Rigid deadlines, particularly for girls, are common and resented. Shunning (isolating) people labeled as immoral appears to be a rule. One girl told me her best friend had "gotten into trouble" - became pregnant. Nobody in town would have anything to do with her. The informant's parents forbid her to even visit this friend; although, she confided to me that she did so anyway. At the same time it appeared to me that the youth of Holmes County were not experiencing as much of a problem in widespread and excessive

use of alcohol as the Taos County youth. Almost all youth I talked to in Holmes County had tried both alcohol and pot but few were heavy regular users and it appeared that relatively few used "heavy stuff." From what I learned I would say that youth in Holmes County found it much more difficult to obtain both alcohol (before they were 18) and drugs than their counterparts in Taos County.

I probed rather extensively in the area of patterns of sexual behavior and found those in Holmes County to be similar to what was observed in Taos County. Here's some of the things one of my respondents had to say about this subject:

> Girl-17: What do you do on dates? "Go to a movie or bowl in Sugar Creek or Dover." I asked if the kids around here do much parking. She said, "No." I really didn't believe her -- she didn't say "no" very convincingly. So I probed. Eventually she admitted that some do -- but she doesn't approve of it. I asked if kids around here get into sex pretty heavy and she said they don't. A few girls get into "trouble" -- she has a good friend who is pregnant and unmarried. I asked how people treat her friend. "Pretty bad. I'm not supposed to even talk to her -- but I do." I said, "Are your parents afraid of you hurting your reputation by being around her?" She replied, "Yes, that's it exactly." "How do you find out about contraceptive devices, the pill - sex?" I asked. "From the older girls." She continued, "You don't even talk about sex around here -- not with older people." She indicated that they have no sex education in the schools and certainly not in church. She went on to say that there is not even a place to dance around here.

I asked one of my informants, a young man, about this girl and why she wasn't asked out more often - she had told me she wasn't asked on dates much. He knew her as a friend and responded thus: "Well, you know a lot of guys my age just want one thing from a girl -- a piece of ass. She isn't that way, she's the nice kind of girl. I've given her rides on my bike before." Could one infer from his comments that the reward for being a "nice girl" in this community is to go dateless for prolonged periods of time?

Evidently, except for the young men during their "wild oats sowing" period and a few deviants (alcoholics), the Amish pretty well follow their

rigid moral standards in practice. Many of the "High People" youth dislike the Amish and reflect negatively on the behavior of the young Amish men as illustrated by the following comments I recorded:

> Male-16: "We don't have proms -- we have banquets instead." He told me the Amish are to blame. (He said nothing about his Amish heritage though.) "How do you get along with them?" I asked. "Pretty good most of the time -- except when they're drunk." I asked if there are ever any fights between the Amish and Non-Amish. He said yes and then added, "I fought one." I asked why. "Because he was drunk and wanted to fight."
>
> Male-18: "I get along with them -- I was brought up in the middle of them. I used to help them with farm work. Sometimes they'd invite me to their parties." I asked if these were drinking parties. "Yes," he said, apparently surprised that I would ask. Apparently young men (sometimes older ones too) will gather and drink at somebody's home while the rest of the family is traveling over a weekend or so. They usually will not permit non-Amish to stay at these "parties." He does say sometimes he has had problems with them -- "the men, over girls." "It's hard to meet Amish girls," he added. (How well I know that this is true!).

These remarks also demonstrate clearly the interethnic hostility existing generally in this area.

Orientations and Felt Needs

Like the Taos County youth studied, the Holmes County youth indicate a desire to leave their communities. Unlike the Spanish American youth, the Holmes County youth indicate strong intentions of leaving this area of residence permanently because they dislike their present communities. The Spanish American youth demonstrated clearly and consistently general positive evaluations for their places of residence; although, they had some explicit faults to find with them as a good context for youth. Conversely, on the whole the youth in Eastern Holmes County demonstrated explicit negative feelings about their present communities.

Similar to the situation of the Taos County youth, most of the Holmes County youth could tell you explicitly what jobs they eventually wanted to

obtain - driver of a semi-truck, coal miner, art teacher, pro baseball player, and a technician. Unlike their Spanish American counterparts, however, most of the Holmes County youth felt relatively certain of attaining these life goals. Also, the youth in both cultural areas indicate a desire to marry later than their parents; however, the Holmes County youth tended to desire more children than the Taos County youth. In both cases, only one youth I interviewed was even thinking about the possibility of going to college.

The self-indicated high priority concerns and needs of the two groupings of youth differed substantially. In Taos County these were related to gaining means of mobility for excursions out of the village and money to use for themselves - getting "wheels" and a job. The Holmes County youth had these things for the most part. Their strongest felt needs seem to revolve around two very different things: (1) a felt need to have greater freedom relative to the oppressive normative structures evolving from the rigid, narrow, religiously based moral values that prevail, and (2) the need to evolve positive affect situations outside the family as a result of generally negative ones existing within that context. Obviously, the felt needs of the Taos County youth would be easier to meet than those of their Holmes County counterparts.

A general commonality was shared among the two sets of youths relative to their general views of adults in power over them in the community: that adults were not sensitive to the needs of youth - that they didn't care. Again, in Holmes County one repeatedly heard the plea of youth for "something to do." When asked what could be done to improve the life situation of youth in their communities, the consistent response was to give them a facility to associate with peers in ways that they desired (i.e., dancing). One got the definite impression from the youth in Holmes County that the only interest the older people had in youth was to control them relative to the prevalent

normative codes. If this is so, they weren't doing a very good job even in accomplishing this end.

The Amish situation in this respect remains largely an unknown to me. The one Amish young man I interviewed intensively desired to be a farmer, had no interest in future education, desired to eventually marry and raise a large family, and (I presume) stay within the church. He did desire, however, to move away from the local community, but actually anticipated remaining within it.

Overview Comments

In a paper I presented a few months ago providing a detailed description of my Taos County findings I provided a statement that I would like to repeat here because it is as true for the Holmes County research experience as it was for the former. It pertains to my personal reflections on this research adventure:

> To observe is to intrude. However little your observations are noticed by those you observed, their acts will be influenced by the fact that you are there. To be an active observer is to intrude substantially. If you have made friends in the process of observing you have been an active observer - I made some friends. And, I gained in other less significant ways from the generosity of my subjects in tolerating my intrusions into their daily lives and the privacy of their thoughts. What did I give in return, besides some tokens of appreciation? I hope that in my conversations with the young people I gave some direct enjoyment - several indicated explicitly that I had. In my conversations with some of the adults I may have started a process of questioning and thought - one which might lead them to consider ways of serving the felt needs of their young people. With this paper I think I have demonstrated an understanding of some of the patterned aspects of the young peoples' life situation that is not widely recognized by them or others. I plan to share this with them and to give them the opportunity to correct any erroneous observations or the inferences I have made. I will not consider this research completed until I have a chance to incorporate these reactions.

I do not intend to develop here a comprehensive, systematic summary or set of conclusions. These are built into the story I had to tell and I want the reader to view the patterns in context and in terms of qualifying or

conditional modifying statements.

There is little doubt in my mind after having lived this research experience that I gained knowledge and sympathetic understanding of the status of rural youth in our society and of the potential variability in the specification of that status in terms of social relationships evolving as a result of differences in cultural and organizational structures related to communities of residence. Clearly, the social organization of the life situations of the two culturally different sets of youth varied markedly in some respects. This was in turn associated with variability in life orientations, values, and felt needs. One outstanding impact made upon me in this regard was in the realization of the importance of religious orientations and organization in influencing other aspects of youth's life situation. Religion in its relative absence or presence appears to have significant impacts of both a positive and negative nature on the subjectively evaluated life situations of rural youth; whether they consciously realize this or not. One concrete result of this realization on my part has been the development of an intention on my part to begin exploring more extensively the significance of religion on youth's life situation, an intention I have already acted upon in terms of analysis of research data I had accumulated over a decade on other youth populations in Texas, which included indicators of religious orientations and church participation.[4]

FOOTNOTES

1. These include a continuous tri-ethnic study of Anglo, Black, and Mexican American rural youth in Texas started in 1966 and still active. See my recent publication, Rural Youth in the USA: Profile of an Ignored Minority, College Station, Texas: Texas Agricultrual Experiment Station. Departmental Technical Report No. 77-3, 1977.

2. William P. Kuvlesky. "Youth in Northern Taos County, New Mexico: No One Cares." Paper presented at the 1977 annual meetings of the Association of Humanist Sociology, Hempstead, New York, November, 1977.

3. Ibid., pp. 4-12.

4. William P. Kuvlesky. "A Tri-Ethnic Comparison of the Religious Involvements and Orientations of Texas Rural Youth: A Study of Black, White, and Mexican American Adolescents." Paper presented at the 1978 Texas Academy of Science Annual Meetings, Lubbock, Texas, March, 1978.